



**Submission to the Public Inquiry Respecting Ground  
Search and Rescue for Lost and Missing Persons'**

**November 8, 2021**

**Submitted by the NunatuKavut Community Council and prepared in collaboration with  
Wiseman Consulting Services**

***CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY***

## **1. Introduction**

We begin our presentation today with acknowledgement and gratitude to the Commissioner, the Honourable James Igloliorte. We want to express our gratitude to the commission and its collective colleagues for the invitation to present to the Public Inquiry Respecting Ground Search and Rescue for Lost and Missing Persons (the “Inquiry”) on this important, life and death topic.

In acknowledging and respecting the objective and intent of the inquiry, we will constrain comments and recommendations, as much as possible, to the subject jurisdictions outlined in the Terms of Reference. Given the interoperability with significant components of Maritime Search and Rescue, it will be necessary, at times, to draw on our needs and aspirations in that area. Our main intent, in all regards, is to strengthen our position towards Ground Search and Rescue (SAR) and the needs for an overall effective SAR system, on land and at sea.

## **2. NunatuKavut**

### **2.1. Background and Governance**

Firstly, it is important to provide some background and perspective on our land, our people and the NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC).

NCC is the representative governing body for more than 6,000 Inuit primarily residing in south and central Labrador. Translated from Inuttitut, NunatuKavut means "Our Ancient Land." Inuit in southeast Labrador have practiced seasonal migration from time immemorial. Traditionally, Inuit from this area shifted between headlands in the summer and fall months, and interior bay areas in the winter and spring. This moving with the seasons and the resources allowed Inuit to hunt and harvest, sustaining themselves and their families. Our people did not live in permanent settlements until the 1960s. Today, NunatuKavut encompasses more than 20 permanent communities, with the vast majority of members residing along Labrador’s south coast, south of Hamilton Inlet. As it was in times of old, and still today, we are deeply connected to the land, sea and ice that make up NunatuKavut, our home.

The rights of NunatuKavut Inuit are represented by NCC. NCC is led by a Governing Council elected by our membership. It is comprised of a President and Vice-President, Councillors representing each of the six areas in our territory, as well as an area that represents non-resident members, and an Elder and a Youth Councillor. The primary function of NCC is to ensure the land, ice and water rights as well as titles of its people are recognized and respected. We are also fully present at the grassroots level in our communities, providing a variety of services to NunatuKavut Inuit – living within and outside Labrador.

In July 2018, Canada announced the start of talks with NCC on the Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination (RIRSD). This is a new and evolving process for the federal government and NCC.

In September 2019, NCC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Canada, which outlines the general principles of discussion and sets the stage for next steps in the RIRSD process. This provides an opportunity to advance such matters as self-governance on our lands, waters, resources and programs and services. The MOU also serves to better define relationships and map a more robust way forward with our provincial and territorial partners. In this regard, the provision of SAR, especially ground SAR, is an important subject of interest and concern.

## **2.2. Community and Emotional Toll**

The current Inquiry is being followed with intense interest by NCC members. Inasmuch as we want to convey an array of issues and aspirations to the Inquiry, we also look forward to learning from it. To that point, we have learned firsthand of the deep emotional distraught affecting the family of the late Burton Winter, which has been expressed through this Inquiry by his next-of-kin, their legal counsel, and the community of Makkovik. This Inquiry has heard of the deep impact of the loss of Burton and the frustration endured as a result of a SAR system that presented notable challenges in providing resources needed for an effective SAR effort.

As a people who share many of the same kinship networks with those in the north, we feel the deep sense of pain of the Winters' family loss. That deep sense of pain and loss is tragically part of the story of many families right here in this area, squarely in the heart of NunatuKavut.

This fall, on September 17, two young men were lost at sea when their 28-foot fishing vessel failed to return to port from an inshore fishing trip in close proximity to Battle Harbour. The two men, Marc Russell and Joey Jenkins, were barely into the infancy of their working lives, represented the heart and spirit of their community. They were lost for reasons unknown, among the many elements of risks faced by residents of NunatuKavut every time they venture into the elements of a nurturing but northern and sometimes harsh hostile environment, whether at sea or on the land.

As in the Burton Winters tragedy in Makkovik, the loss of Marc and Joey raised questions and concerns among residents around the search effort needed to undertake a SAR and a search recovery mission for the missing men. Although there are certain facets of this particular mission which are beyond the scope of this Inquiry, it is important for the Inquiry to hear these stories so as to have a greater understanding and appreciation for their impact on GSAR operations. There are certainly compelling lessons from these and other tragedies for NCC is that going forward we intend to be more engaged to better understand the SAR needs of our communities and we

intend to be more proactive in accessing the resources necessary to ensure we have the best SAR infrastructure and service available.

### **2.3. Community and Citizen Outreach**

In preparing for our presentation to the Commission on Ground SAR, NCC engaged in significant outreach with citizens in communities throughout NunatuKavut. This was done in order to better understand the concerns and expectations of our members relating to SAR services in times of emergencies.

Personal testimonies from our people gave a great sense of generational history in terms of how communities rallied to meet the needs of SAR emergencies. Formal SAR processes, which most are familiar with today, did not exist during past decades. There was, nevertheless, great utility and efficiency entrenched in community obligation and spirit when the need arose to search for lost and missing people.

A wide range of concerns were identified by NCC members, including:

- The impact of time limitations during life and death situations.
- Loss of valuable time in organizing formal searches.
- The value of understanding local conditions of weather as well as land and sea characteristics.
- Current disparities between organizing a search at sea (maritime) and land-based SAR efforts (GSAR).
- Significant terrestrial and sea telecommunications deficiencies (cellular/mobile).
- Significant shortcomings in dedicated air and sea resources (launching proximity) needed for quick responses in a large geographical area.
- Complete lack of GSAR organizations along the Southern Labrador coast.
- Serious mental and emotional health problems for searchers and next-of-kin, associated with traumatic SAR outcomes.
- A serious lack of mental health support from professional health providers.

Personal testimonies provided graphic details and insight into community searches that resulted in successful rescues with only minutes and seconds to spare. Freezing temperatures and blizzards were often the norm in this challenging terrain.

On the positive side, NunatuKavut members who were consulted expressed a sincere willingness to organize and volunteer their services. They talked of a skill set suited for GSAR, if properly organized. The Canadian Rangers were praised as a good organization with skillful volunteers. Good leadership, suitable equipment and excellent training were noted to exist in the Ranger's organization. Many believed the Canadian Rangers could provide adequate GSAR response all

along the coast, if called upon to do so by their superiors. There was also information provided that they are underutilized, likewise with other assets like Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

#### **2.4. SAR Resource Gaps**

A stark reality illustrated in both the Makkovik tragedy and the most recent tragedy near Mary's Harbour is the fact that NunatuKavut and its adjacent areas to the north are devoid of even a single primary (dedicated) fixed or rotary aircraft with a standard SAR standby posture, stationed in an acceptable area of proximity to our lands. The closest area for dedicated air resources is in Gander where the 103 Rescue Squadron has a primary, CH-149, Cormorant helicopter(s) in a state of readiness with a thirty (30) minute standby posture during normal working hours and a two (2) hour standby posture after normal working hours, weekends, and holidays.

If a primary fixed wing aircraft were required, it would have to come all the way from the 413 Rescue Squadron in Greenwood, Nova Scotia, which has the same standby posture as the 103 Rescue Squadron in Gander.

From a maritime or surface standpoint, there is not a single primary (dedicated) waterborne craft with a standard national standby posture of thirty (30) minutes to be found in NunatuKavut or any of its adjacent areas to the North. By comparison, the island portion of the province can boast of no less than seven (7) multimillion-dollar modern-day lifeboat stations with thirty (30) minutes standby postures, spaced in ports all around the province. This is further reinforced by four (4) seasonal Inshore Rescue Bases (IRBs) equipped with Fast Rescue Crafts (FRCs) in various areas of the island and additional designated primary SAR areas resourced by dedicated ships from the regional Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) base in St. John's.

While it might be said these kinds of resources are part of a federal SAR program, the existence of these resources highlights the glaring inequity in SAR services from a geographical standpoint. More importantly, and for the purpose of this Inquiry, which is oriented exclusively towards the provincial mandate of Ground SAR, this inequity affects the availability of resources related to humanitarian needs, which often arise during a Ground SAR or recovery efforts. In emergency situations, where every minute and second counts, the lack of adequate dedicated resources in NunatuKavut is untenable.

Alternative options when resources are needed for Ground SAR incidents in NunatuKavut are facilitated by provincial Emergency Services or by special request to federal agencies like the Joint Rescue Centres (JRCCs) or the CCG. Provincial resources, which often involve contracting from private sources, carry with them an inferior capability compared to federal SAR programming resources. Essential elements such as professionally trained crews, resource endurance,

limitations on poor weather and night-time flying are inhibiting factors when unavailable in life and death situations.

We have also learned through the Inquiry that very modern SAR capable air resources are available in the private sector. In their presentation to the Inquiry, both Cougar Helicopters Inc. and Provincial Aerospace detailed world class rotary and fixed wing resources that could be contracted for dedicated SAR purposes.

In the absence of adequate SAR resources that may or may not be available from the federal SAR program on a humanitarian basis, there would seem to be an obligation within the scope of the provincial mandate on Ground SAR to incorporate these kinds of life-saving resource options into their provincial SAR program.

### **2.5. Ground SAR Infrastructure (GAPS)**

NCC has relied heavily on the information it has acquired through the presentations of Ground SAR experts who have participated in this Inquiry to date.

Mr. Harry Blackmore, President of the NL Search & Rescue Association (NLSARA), provided some very important insights on his twenty-five (25) teams of Ground SAR divisions in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The dedication and resourcefulness of his teams of volunteers are exceptional. Developing skills and acquiring resources and infrastructure necessary to conduct Ground SAR missions in the face of huge funding challenges is no small feat, under any circumstances.

When we measure where the Province is in their capacity to effectively conduct a Ground SAR program in NunatuKavut against the work of NLSARA and all its outreach, it is indeed concerning. We are encouraged by the existence of Ground SAR teams in Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Labrador West. These communities are home to many of our members and border the vast area of NunatuKavut that are without similar infrastructure. There is concern about the tremendous void that exists in many NunatuKavut communities on the southern Labrador coast. It is unfathomable that there is not one single Ground SAR team in place from Cartwright to the Quebec/Labrador border.

### **3. Bridging the Gap in Ground SAR Preparedness**

Our current knowledge of the SAR system in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, as supplemented by what we have learned from participants at the Inquiry, tells us the police forces are the lead command and control agency in Ground SAR matters. This extends to the organization and coordination of Ground SAR capacity building in preparation for readiness

towards SAR missions. Through our participation in this Inquiry, NCC is identifying and emphasizing a fundamental need for SAR resources and support in NunatuKavut. We are extending our outreach for help to the police, specifically the RCMP, and the NLSARA as facilitators, to help us fill the organizational and capacity gap in ground SAR for NunatuKavut communities on the southern Labrador coast.

#### **4. Ground SAR (Command and Control)**

In referencing phase one of this Inquiry, the discussion and background paper written by Mr. Richard Smith (an expert engaged by the Inquiry Commission), illustrates a very elaborate and comprehensive SAR system in this province and across the country. There are many moving parts within the scope of the entire SAR system and, in order for it to work in any fashion, there must be a high level of interoperability among agencies and individuals.

One of the most notable items contained in Mr. Smith's discussion paper, as well as his subsequent presentation to the Inquiry participants in St. John's, is his reference to the SAR command-and-control structure. The Department of National Defense is clearly delineated as the lead command and control agency in the case of maritime and aviation SAR matters. As the jurisdiction changes to include provincial and territorial mandates for Ground SAR, command-and-control operative changes to reflect the authority under each jurisdiction. For example, if a Ground SAR mission was at play anywhere in Parks Canada jurisdiction, Parks Canada would assume command-and-control lead. Likewise, if the Ground SAR mission was located in a provincial jurisdiction the police force is command-and-control lead.

Consistent with our goals and objectives on self-determination, our long-term ambition is to be the lead command-and-control agency relating to Ground SAR matters in NunatuKavut. In the interim, we must be pragmatic and responsible in our approach on that level of Ground SAR. In the short and medium-term, we see ourselves working in a very collaborative fashion under existing SAR structures. We see the police in their current role as lead in the command and control structure as our partners. Likewise, we see the NLSARA as a valued partner and an important gateway to acquiring the skills and infrastructure needed for us to be a full participant in the ground SAR regime for all of NunatuKavut.

#### **5. A Valuable Partner for Ground SAR**

As a full collaborative partner in the Ground SAR community, we bring significant value to any SAR team. NunatuKavut brings capable volunteers with a natural skill set passed down from generations of NunatuKavut Inuit living on the land. Our people also intimately know the lands, ice and waters around them. With additional orientation and added formal training, Ground SAR

teams made up of NunatuKavut community members would represent a very powerful tool in times of emergencies related to lost and missing persons.

NCC has assets and skilled people already employed in protection and stewardship roles throughout NunatuKavut. One of our best examples is the Guardian Program, which has just acquired modern watercraft resources and trained staff empowered to conduct enforcement and conservation measures for our fish and wildlife resources.

NunatuKavut can also proudly boast of a number of our people in all communities along the Southern Labrador coast who are existing members of the Canadian Rangers. The Canadian Rangers are a reserve contingent made-up of Canadian civilians operating in a volunteer capacity under the Department of National Defense (DND). The Ground SAR tragedy involving the loss of Burton Winters certainly illustrated the competency and value of this dedicated group of volunteers in humanitarian engagements for lost and missing persons. DND's continued reliance and priority on the Canadian Rangers would once again compliment the strengths of NunatuKavut when it comes to being a full and valued partner within Canada's SAR system.

Similar things can be said about the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary (CGA), which already forms a large part of one of the best CGA organizations in Canada. CGA participants along the southern Labrador coast, which form a coastal network of communities within NunatuKavut, have already demonstrated exemplarily services for their role in SAR missions of a humanitarian and maritime nature within the Canadian SAR system.

NCC has documented and journalized vast amounts of knowledge and detail, which is digitized in its Cumulative Data Base (CDB). The CDB system is a product of information gleaned from "An Inventory of Studies on Land and Sea Uses in NunatuKavut since 1979." The information and mapping are spread out over seven significant projects, which have been completed by professionals over many years of study. The CDB is composed of a range of information which includes land routes, trapping lines, tilts, cabins and tenting areas. All this represents invaluable information for the purpose of ground SAR missions taking place in NunatuKavut.

## **6. Future Trends**

Clearly, many NunatuKavut Inuit do not have access to the same Ground SAR supports as other residents of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Current practices and future trends in coastal areas of NunatuKavut reflect intense seasonal activity. As an example, reconciliation efforts and other dynamics, not the least of which is related to climate change effects, are pointing to a changing fishery with much longer seasons and further distances to travel. This feature is, in fact, accelerating at a very fast pace. SAR emergencies will increase exponentially as will the need for preparedness.



The NCC Cumulative Data Base reflect, among many things, NunatuKavut members spending a significant portion of their time away from their home residence in pursuit of land and sea activities for sustenance and cultural purposes. Hunting and trapping is a “rite of passage” for many NunatuKavut Inuit and a necessary function of culture and food security. This will not change anytime in the future. Again, new realities, including effects of climate change, have profoundly changed the characteristics of these activities. Hydro-lines and the new Labrador highway have created infinitely more access to hunting and fishing areas. Not only have hunting areas changed or opened up, but sea ice has eroded traditional routes for significant portions of the year and that will undoubtedly accelerate with projected climate warming.

While the full scope of all these impacts is still evolving at a rapid pace, we can be assured it will mean exponential SAR needs for NunatuKavut. New highways have also given new meaning to outside accessibility from non-residents. The positive side to this is the advent of economic development through tourism. The other side of this positive is the increased needs for SAR services in response to inevitable emergencies in NunatuKavut.

Significant study and analysis are needed on the issue of current and future trends impacting SAR for NunatuKavut and the north in general. After two years of study, the House of Commons Senate report on SAR in 2018, entitled “Every Minute Counts,” recognized similar conclusions as NCC. Climate and other pending pressures, many of them commercial, are creating a true paradigm shift in the north. Mining, northern fisheries, eco-tourism and new travel routes are just some of the issues that have SAR implications.

In the face of these and other factors, the Senate Committee, in its report, was moved to recommend a highly enhanced and increased SAR infrastructure presence for the North. The Senate even advanced the idea of an innovative pilot project involving the contacting of dedicated SAR equipped air resources from private interests in order to fill current and future gaps. Clearly, the overall capacity of our SAR system in NunatuKavut and all northern areas will be tested against the backdrop of these underlying trends. Our ability to manage and deliver to the people who depend on it may very well be an ultimate function and test of sovereignty for the lands we call home.

## **7. Goose Bay – 444 Squadron**

The Department of National Defense (DND) and all its facilities, along with the civilian commercial airport infrastructure in Goose Bay, create a tremendous presence against the backdrop of SAR in Labrador. It is practically in the backyard of NunatuKavut, in terms of aviation support.

It is true that significant secondary government and commercial resources are often available for SAR on both a humanitarian and contract basis from commercial companies. It is known that the CAF Bell CH-146 Griffon Helicopters are often resourced for Ground SAR recovery and

humanitarian missions. Unfortunately, these are not a dedicated SAR resource, and consequently, often unavailable for critical SAR missions. This was the case during much of the Burton Winters tragedy when all Griffon aircrafts were unserviceable during critical periods of the search in Makkovik. Even when available, the Griffin aircrafts are inferior to the dedicated CH-149 Cormorant Helicopter station at the 103 Squadron in Gander and the 413 Squadron in Greenwood, Nova Scotia.

This clearly begs the question of why dedicated SAR air resources with a SAR standby posture are not stationed in such a capable location. Likewise, it compels us to put forward the request for these facilities to play a strategic role in a dedicated SAR capacity. While we whole-heartily endorse the pilot project concept put forward in the Senate report of 2018, we understand the constraints on this inquiry to venture into federal jurisdiction with recommendation on that front. Nevertheless, there should be consideration under the Ground SAR mandate of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to introduce reasonable levels of dedicated SAR air resources to serve the vast geography of NunatuKavut and other areas of Labrador.

The 444 Squadron would appear to be a superior facilitating base for the Civil Air Search & Rescue Association (CASARA). CASARA is a nation-wide volunteer aviation organization with its main function tethered to supporting the Royal Canadian Air Force. Their work in a humanitarian capacity, when requested and authorized by the lead command and control agency (JRCC), is invaluable and one NCC would like to see having a presence in NunatuKavut.

CASARA once had a zone organized in Wabush but has since ceased operations, which leaves only the Deer Lake and St. John's zones active in all of Newfoundland and Labrador. With active hunting and fishing lodges in NunatuKavut, serviced by aviation vehicles, NCC would like to reach out to the organizers of the CASARA group to encourage an active volunteer zone within the Goose Bay airport facilities.

## **8. Conclusion**

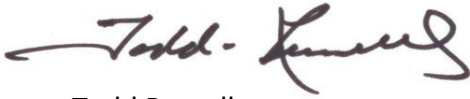
NCC is dutifully aware of its responsibility to the people of NunatuKavut and, above all, their health, safety and well-being is paramount. As the traditional stewards and guardians of our territory, we assert that our people are in a very significant and critical position to provide relevant traditional knowledge and help with the decision-making process, including decision-making on SAR (on land and at sea for those living in our coastal communities)

We have reached out to our people to identify needs and concerns. We have learned from our people in NunatuKavut communities, and we have learned from those participating in this Inquiry. We know that there are partners waiting and we want to reach out in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration to achieve what is best for our people in SAR.

NCC's recommendations to this Inquiry are set out in Schedule "A."

We look forward to the report from this important Inquiry and fully expect it will play a key role in helping us secure a modern, world-class SAR system for NunatuKavut and all of Labrador.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Todd Russell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Todd Russell

President, NunatuKavut Community Council

## Schedule "A"

### Recommendations

NCC has given careful consideration to SAR recommendations to advance SAR capacity building in NunatuKavut and meet the needs of NunatuKavut Inuit. We have also had the benefit of considering a broad range of presentations and testimonies before the Inquiry to date.

We note that the Inquiry has published a draft set of provisional recommendations at this time. Many of the recommendations reflect the concerns and needs in NunatuKavut. Rather than duplicate these recommendations, we want to strongly signal our endorsement in key areas such as:

- Appropriate funding support for GSAR teams to assist with training, liability insurance, equipment, and other items noted by the NLSARA;
- Mental health support for GSAR personnel and next-of-kin who are exposed to stress related SAR missions and accidents;
- Establishment of better communications networks and facilities in rural and remote locations;
- A more equitable aviation resource allocation for GSAR from federal and provincial agencies, and
- More recruitment and retention efforts for volunteer organizations.

In assisting the Inquiry in its deliberations towards a final report, NCC offers the following additional summary recommendations that:

1. The Inquiry acknowledge the unique characteristics of NunatuKavut within the scope of the provincial mandate on GSAR and recommend that the provincial government undertake a full needs analysis within six months, in conjunction with the NCC, designed to formally identify the existing gaps in SAR infrastructure.
2. Based on the formal "needs analysis," Emergency Services of the provincial government, collaborate with the NCC in creating a long-term NunatuKavut strategic plan for GSAR with special emphasis directed towards shortcomings in current SAR infrastructure.
3. Appropriate police forces and the NLSARA collaborate with NCC in creating additional GSAR volunteer teams in areas of NunatuKavut that are currently without this important organization.
4. Immediate measures be taken to address the serious deficiencies in dedicated surface and air resources for NunatuKavut.

5. Special emphasis be placed on the Goose Bay airport and the DND 444 Air Force Base in facilitating dedicated rotary and fixed-wing air resources in support of SAR for NunatuKavut.
6. In conjunction with existing aviation companies and outfitters, outreach to the Canadian Air SAR Association (CASARA) be initiated to form a zonal team at the Goose Bay CAF Air Base.
7. Reliable communications networks, such as mobile and overall cellular towers and repeaters, be established in NunatuKavut inland and coastal areas.
8. In order to address existing gaps in Ground SAR Teams in NunatuKavut and, where trained and competent Canadian Rangers are present in communities along the southern Labrador coast, special measures be implemented to detail and ensure their full utilization during SAR emergencies. Moreover, and where maritime resources are required on a humanitarian basis, a similar arrangement be made to ensure effective and efficient utilization of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary (CGA).
9. In the interest of interoperability among SAR stakeholders, proactive measures be undertaken by the multi-jurisdictional Command-and-Control leads to formalize a smooth and informed decision-making matrix regarding available resources to be utilized during SAR emergencies. Furthermore, a formal inventory of available resources such as Department of Fisheries (DFO) Conservation and Protection watercraft vehicles and NCC Guardian watercrafts, as well as others of opportunity, should be journalized for utilization in SAR emergencies.
10. Due to the transient nature of police personnel in NunatuKavut, clarity and communications be required around the role and responsibilities of the RCMP in relation to SAR and that, at all times, RCMP officers be well-trained and have the capacity to lead SAR missions. Furthermore, the RCMP have a clear understanding of the resources that are available to them and that this information is clearly communicated to NCC and NunatuKavut communities.